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ABSTRACT

Universal prekindergarten (UPK) refers to the goal of making available to families of all 3- and 4-year-olds a program of services that provides high quality education for children and helps to prepare them for a successful entry to kindergarten. Virtually every state is engaged in discussions about prekindergarten programs, and many models are being proposed. This working paper examines the lessons from preschool special education that could help inform current UPK initiatives. The paper describes the history and current status of programs serving preschoolers with disabilities and highlights selected issues as they can inform current UPK discussion. Based on the assumption that some form of UPK is a desirable goal, the paper identifies and discusses seven lessons from the disability initiatives: (1) establish a network of model prekindergarten demonstration programs; (2) establish a national technical assistance center for UPK; (3) create a national set of guidelines to shape state initiatives; (4) provide financial incentives and flexible funding to stimulate and support UPK; (5) involve parents and advocates in all aspects of planning and implementation; (6)play a federal role in personnel development is essential; and (7) establish state and local interagency coordinating councils. Implications of UPK for preschool special education are then examined; discussion includes state education agency involvement in UPK, increased opportunities for inclusionary placements for children with disabilities, a reconceptualization of preschool special education program structure and function, and revision of program guidelines and funding streams. (KB)

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WORKING PAPER SERIES

WHAT CAN UNIVERSAL PREKINDERGARTEN LEARN FROM SPECIAL EDUCATION?

Don Bailey, Ph.D.

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WORKING PAPER SERIES

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The purpose of the working paper series is to share ideas and potential solutions about how all American families can meet the basic requirements for the healthy development of their children. Views expressed in this paper are those of the author. Email: Don_Bailey@unc.edu

Introduction

MANY CHILDREN TODAY, PERHAPS AS MANY AS 40 PERCENT, ENTER KINDERGARTEN NOT READY TO SUCCEED WITH THE TYPES OF ACTIVITIES AND EXPECTATIONS TYPICALLY OFFERED BY SCHOOLS.

Universal prekindergarten (UPK) refers to the goal of making available to families of all three- and four-year-olds a program of services that provides high quality education for children and helps prepare them for a successful entry to kindergarten. Although many factors have contributed to current efforts to advocate for this goal, two stand out as especially important. First, many children today, perhaps as many as 40 percent, enter kindergarten not ready to succeed with the types of activities and expectations typically offered by schools. The transition to kindergarten is a formative period in shaping a child's later success in school, but it is unlikely that changing the entry process alone will correct this problem. Only a sustained and comprehensive program of services during the preschool period can hope to alter trajectories in a way that significantly improves the odds of success.

PERHAPS AS MANY AS 60 PERCENT OF THE CHILDREN IN ORGANIZED CHILDCARE RECEIVE CARE AND EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES THAT ARE NOT CONSIDERED TO BE OF HIGH QUALITY.

Second, many children today, perhaps as many as 60 percent of the children in organized childcare, receive care and educational experiences that are not considered to be of high quality. Research consistently shows a relationship between quality of care and both immediate and long-term outcomes for children. This relationship is evident in both social-emotional and academic outcomes. It is unlikely that dramatic improvements will come from activities such as changing state childcare regulations or providing training and consultation to existing childcare centers. A coordinated system of services with high standards for personnel, leadership, and programming is needed if substantial changes in quality are to occur.

A COORDINATED SYSTEM OF SERVICES WITH HIGH STANDARDS FOR PERSONNEL, LEADERSHIP, AND PROGRAMMING IS NEEDED IF SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES IN QUALITY ARE TO OCCUR.

Children from low-income families and those from ethnic minority groups are especially at risk for early school failure and lack of access to high quality childcare or early educational experiences. Targeted initiatives such as Head Start attempt to provide some services for children who meet certain eligibility criteria. Universal prekindergarten, however, is based on the assumption that society is best served by a coordinated program that offers access to all children, not just children in need.

UNIVERSAL PREKINDERGARTEN (UPK) IS BASED ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT SOCIETY IS BEST SERVED BY A COORDINATED PROGRAM THAT OFFERS ACCESS TO ALL CHILDREN.

Questions such as whether universal prekindergarten is a desirable social policy, who would coordinate these programs, how they would be financed, and what the nature of the

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curriculum and other activities would be are currently being discussed at many levels. Virtually every state is now actively engaged in discussions about prekindergarten programs, and many different models are now being proposed.

FOR ONE GROUP OF CHILDREN, THOSE WHO HAVE IDENTIFIED DISABILITIES, A FORM OF UPK HAS BEEN AVAILABLE FOR MORE THAN 15 YEARS.

For one group of children, those who have identified disabilities, a form of UPK has been available for more than 15 years. What lessons can be learned from this effort that could help inform current UPK initiatives? What would be the ramifications of UPK for children with disabilities and the programs that serve them? This working paper addresses these questions by describing the history and current status of programs serving preschoolers with disabilities and discussing selected issues as they can inform current discussions about UPK.

A Historical Perspective

A disability is an impairment or condition that interferes with development and school functioning. A federal commitment to services for young children with disabilities began in 1968, when the U.S. Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (BEH) established the Handicapped Children's Early Education Program. This program funded model demonstration projects around the country to show parents, professionals, and policy makers the different ways that preschool services could be provided and that these programs could be successful. The program continues today, having funded hundreds of projects, many of which continued even when federal funding ended.

In 1971, the Bureau funded Techincal Assistance Development System, which was initially designed to help the demonstration and outreach projects describe, improve, and evaluate the models they were developing. Some version of this project has been continuously funded since. Although its mission has changed with changes in federal legislation, it now exists as the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, with the mission of helping states implement federal legislation for young children with disabilities and assuring a high-quality and integrated program of services.

In 1972, Congress required Head Start, a federally funded program for low-income children, to assure that at least 10% of the children enrolled have an identifiable disability. This mandate continues today, and now about 15 percent of all

Head Start children have some sort of disability, although most have mild speech or language impairments.

PRIOR TO 1975, CONSIDERABLE VARIABILITY WAS EVIDENT IN SCHOOL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES.

Prior to 1975, considerable variability was evident in school services for children with disabilities. Parents often had to fight to convince schools that their children should even be admitted, and once enrolled often also had to fight to assure appropriate services. In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142), landmark legislation assuring that every child with a disability has a right to a free, appropriate, public education (known as FAPE). The law gives guidelines for how these services are to be provided, with several fundamental assumptions. Among these are *individualization* (because each child has a unique set of needs and strengths, an individualized assessment must be conducted and an individualized program of services must be provided), *least restrictive environment* (children must be served in regular classrooms with typically developing peers if at all possible), and *due process* (parents have rights regarding these programs and a mechanism for appeal is available if they feel these rights are not being met).

THE 1975 EDUCATION FOR ALL HANDICAPPED CHILDREN ACT ASSURED THAT EVERY CHILD WITH A DISABILITY HAD A RIGHT TO A FREE, APPROPRIATE, PUBLIC EDUCATION; THE LAW GIVES GUIDELINES FOR HOW THESE SERVICES ARE TO BE PROVIDED.

With this legislation, the level of attention to disability services was elevated within the U.S. Department of Education. A separate office, now known as the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, was established and an Assistant Secretary of Education is appointed to direct it. Funds are allocated on a per-child basis to cover part of the costs of special education services and to assure that states participate in the program. A substantial amount of "discretionary" funds is available to support a national program of research, model demonstration, outreach, personnel preparation, and technical assistance centers.

THE 1975 LEGISLATION STATED THAT SCHOOLS SHOULD ALSO SERVE THREE- AND FOUR-YEAR-OLDS WITH DISABILITIES, BUT ENOUGH CAVEATS WERE INCLUDED THAT, IN REALITY, THIS WAS NOT AN ENFORCEABLE REQUIREMENT.

The 1975 legislation stated that schools should also serve three-and four-year-olds with disabilities, but enough caveats were included that, in reality, this was not an enforceable requirement. During the next decade, parents, professionals, and advocacy groups pressed for an expansion of early childhood programs. Several states passed legislation extending FAPE to preschoolers, but many did not and even those that did often did not include all children. In response to these efforts, in 1986 Congress passed Public Law 99-457 requiring states to extend FAPE to all preschoolers with

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IN 1986, CONGRESS PASSED PUBLIC LAW 99-457 REQUIRING STATES TO EXTEND FREE, APPROPRIATE, PUBLIC EDUCATION TO ALL PRESCHOOLERS WITH DISABILITIES.

disabilities. It also established a new program, Part H (now known as Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) for infants and toddlers. The infant-toddler program was (and still is) optional, but financial incentives were provided to stimulate program development, and regulations were created to guide these efforts. Unlike the preschool program, which is mandated under the state education agency, states have discretion as to which agency will oversee the infant and toddler programs.

TODAY, ALL STATES MANDATE SERVICES FOR PRESCHOOLERS WITH DISABILITIES.

Today all states mandate services for preschoolers with disabilities, and all are participating in the Part C program for infants and toddlers. Nationally the infant-toddler program serves about 1.63 percent of the population of children in that age range, and the preschool program serves about 4.88 percent of the population. In contrast, by third grade more than 11 percent of the school-aged population are identified as having a disability to such an extent that special education or related services are required. The increase in proportion of children served across ages is due to many factors, but three are primary: (a) the gradual emergence of symptoms seen in many disorders; (b) the lack of a systematic program of screening and child find services targeting a wide range of disabilities; and (c) the fact that most children with specific learning disabilities (the largest category of children served in public schools) have impairments that only become obvious in the context of expectations for academic performance in school. Within these figures, however, there is wide variability across states. States have discretion as to how they define disability and consequently the criteria for program eligibility vary.

WITHOUT STRONG AND PERSISTENT FEDERAL INITIATIVES, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THE RIGHTS AND SERVICES NOW AFFORDED ALL YOUNG CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES WOULD BE AVAILABLE IN ALL STATES EVEN TODAY.

Lessons Learned for Universal Prekindergarten?

The disability movement was heavily rooted in a civil rights tradition, and the federal government ultimately mandated that states assure equitable access to education for all children with disabilities. Without these strong and persistent federal initiatives, it is unlikely that the rights and services now afforded all young children with disabilities would be available in all states even today.

How will UPK come to pass? Virtually every state is now engaged in discussions about UPK, and many have implemented selected aspects. In some cases, this is due to the advocacy of influential legislators or committed governors. In other

cases, UPK is seen as a legal remedy for the inequities observed in skills at and subsequent to school entry, especially for low-income children and children from ethnic minority groups. Although UPK will probably be a state-based initiative in many respects, considerable discussion is now occurring about federal roles and responsibilities. We are likely to see an increased federal role in some aspects of prekindergarten programs, and states will be looking at their own resources and expertise as well as to foundations and other experts to help in the development of social policy regarding young children. Assuming that some form of universal prekindergarten is a desirable goal, what lessons might be learned from the disability initiatives that could inform this movement? At least seven lessons seem apparent.

LESSON 1: ESTABLISH A NETWORK OF MODEL PREKINDERGARTEN DEMONSTRATION PROGRAMS.

A NETWORK OF MODEL DEMONSTRATION PROGRAMS COULD ARTICULATE A BROAD RANGE OF MODELS FOR HOW SERVICES COULD BE PROVIDED, DEMONSTRATE THE FEASIBILITY AND EFFICACY OF DIFFERENT MODELS, AND SERVE AS A VEHICLE FOR TRAINING OTHERS ABOUT MODEL IMPLEMENTATION.

Considerable debate is now focused on how prekindergarten programs should be organized and the types of activities and experiences that should be provided for children. This debate is influenced in part by research, in part by politics, and in part by philosophical orientation. Some states are already considering a single curriculum or a set of models from which local communities must choose. A network of model demonstration programs could articulate a broad range of models for how services could be provided, demonstrate the feasibility and efficacy of different models, and serve as a vehicle for training others about model implementation. They could also provide a basis for research and evaluation to determine the range of outcomes for each model. Most importantly, such a network may be able to show that with some fundamental features in place (e.g., well-trained teachers, strong leadership, appropriate physical environment, family involvement) many different models could be effective. Model programs could also explore the question of whether one model works better for some children and another is more effective for other children.

THE MODEL DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES HAS BEEN ENORMOUSLY SUCCESSFUL.

The model demonstration program for children with disabilities has been enormously successful. Projects have developed a wide array of curriculum materials and assessment instruments, and field-tested in a variety of communities a wide range of models, both general models and those that address particular domains of development or children with particular types of disabilities. Often these

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models have served as a stimulus for broader community-based or state initiatives, and many federally funded projects have continued to operate after federal funding has ended. A unique feature of this program has been its secondary funding of *outreach* projects. Whereas model demonstration projects are funded to develop and field-test models, outreach projects are funded to share information with others about effective models and help others implement them in their own communities. Collectively these efforts appear to have contributed to helping individuals and communities envision a range of ways to serve young children and to stimulate change.

One advantage that the UPK movement has that the disability movement did not have in the 1960s is that an array of program models have already been developed and are being selectively implemented in a number of sites. Thus the scope of need for model development may not be as great. But there is a need to recognize and describe the array of possible models, and in some cases to develop new models that focus on populations, topics, or settings for which there currently are inadequate examples. Organizing these programs into a model network would be a useful first step. That could be followed by a targeted effort to fund new models over the next few years in areas of identified need. Finally, there is currently no mechanism available that is comparable to the outreach projects currently funded by Office of Special Education Programs. These projects are designed to take well-characterized and evaluated models and help others implement them.

IF A MODEL DEMONSTRATION AND OUTREACH PROGRAM WERE TO BE ESTABLISHED FOR UPK PURPOSES, EMPHASIZING CREDIBLE EVALUATIONS AND PROVIDING SUFFICIENT FUNDS AND INCENTIVES TO ASSURE THAT SUCH EVALUATIONS ARE CONDUCTED PRIOR TO ENTERING THE OUTREACH PHASE WOULD SEEM IMPORTANT.

One problem with the demonstration and outreach programs funded in the disability arena is that the funding for evaluation, the rigor of evaluation methods, and the length of funding for model demonstration projects has not always been sufficient to provide clear evidence of efficacy. If a model demonstration and outreach program were to be established for universal prekindergarten purposes, emphasizing credible evaluations and providing sufficient funds and incentives to assure that such evaluations are conducted prior to entering the outreach phase would seem important.

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LESSON 2: ESTABLISH A NATIONAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER FOR UNIVERSAL PREKINDERGARTEN.

PRIOR EXPERIENCES IN SETTING UP STATE-BASED PROGRAMS FOR PRESCHOOLERS WITH DISABILITIES MAKE IT CLEAR THAT STATES VARY IN THEIR EXPERTISE AND COMMITMENT.

Universal prekindergarten will be driven by both federal and state initiatives. Prior experiences in setting up state-based programs for preschoolers with disabilities make it clear that states vary in their expertise and commitment. A national technical assistance center could help state and local efforts by providing expertise in identified areas of need, organizing cross-state meetings around salient issues, and synthesizing research and national data on the range of programs and models that could help individual states as they engage in their own planning and implementation efforts.

Originally, the technical assistance program for children with disabilities was established to help the model demonstration and outreach projects develop more effective models and ways by which those models could be evaluated. Later, states became the primary focus of technical assistance. Initially the focus of this work was on helping states figure out how to meet federal requirements for implementing legislation. In subsequent years, it has focused on helping states deal with such issues as cross-state variability in eligibility standards or thorny issues such as how to deal with children with severe behavior problems.

THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES HAS ALWAYS BEEN CONCEPTUALIZED AS A SUPPORT FUNCTION RATHER THAN A COMPLIANCE ACTIVITY.

THE PROGRAM HAS SOUGHT TO INDIVIDUALIZE ITS SUPPORT, HELPING STATES ENGAGE IN A PROCESS OF SELF-ASSESSMENT AND LETTING STATE-IDENTIFIED NEEDS DRIVE THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE EFFORT.

Two enduring features of this technical assistance have contributed to its success. First, the program has always been conceptualized as a support function rather than a compliance activity. From its inception, leaders of this work realized that states needed help, but would not ask for it or use it unless they trusted the technical assistance agency and knew that its staff would not be reporting back to the federal government on particular problems an individual state might be having. In the disability arena, technical assistance and program monitoring/evaluation efforts have been relatively independent. For the most part this separation of responsibility has worked well, and any federal level UPK initiative will need to consider the costs and benefits of combining versus separating these functions. Second, the technical assistance program has sought to individualize its support, helping states engage in a process of self-assessment and letting state-identified needs drive the technical assistance effort.

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These characteristics would likely be essential in any technical assistance activity related to universal prekindergarten. A challenge in recent years is that the federal agency overseeing this work has increasingly tried to direct the technical assistance work and use the technical assistance project to aid the agency in accomplishing many of its objectives. This trend is understandable, but at some point it may result in a fundamental shift away from supporting states as a primary goal to one of supporting the federal agency in its tasks. These goals are not mutually exclusive, but care will need to be taken to assure that states continue to receive the types of support they need in ways that are individualized and effective, while at the same time helping all states move toward a common goal of high quality UPK.

CARE WILL NEED TO BE TAKEN TO ASSURE THAT STATES CONTINUE TO RECEIVE THE TYPES OF SUPPORT THEY NEED IN WAYS THAT ARE INDIVIDUALIZED AND EFFECTIVE, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME HELPING ALL STATES MOVE TOWARD A COMMON GOAL OF HIGH QUALITY UPK.

LESSON 3: CREATE A NATIONAL SET OF GUIDELINES TO SHAPE STATE INITIATIVES.

The authors of federal legislation for children with disabilities realized that since education is ultimately a state responsibility, it would be counterproductive to be too specific with respect to the ways in which states provided special education services. However, they also were committed to assuring that certain principles shaped state initiatives. Thus, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) specifies key components of what a comprehensive program of services for children with disabilities should contain, and states are responsible for articulating and demonstrating the specific ways those principles are assured in the context of state and local programs. For the most part, professionals and consumers would agree that these guidelines (e.g., requiring an Individualized Education Plan, mandating services in the least restrictive environment) were essential at the time the legislation was passed. There has been no shortage of challenges in their implementation, however, and debate continues as to whether some regulations are still desirable. This will almost certainly be the case no matter what the regulations, but it is clear that without these regulations, we would see perhaps more cross-state variability than desired in the number and types of children served and in the nature, quantity, and quality of services provided. Cross-state variability can be useful to the extent that it allows states to achieve a common goal in ways that meet each state's individual context. Cross-state variability is less desirable when it results in inequities in the amount or quality of

CROSS-STATE VARIABILITY CAN BE USEFUL TO THE EXTENT THAT IT ALLOWS STATES TO ACHIEVE A COMMON GOAL IN WAYS THAT MEET EACH STATE'S INDIVIDUAL CONTEXT.

CROSS-STATE VARIABILITY IS LESS DESIRABLE WHEN IT RESULTS IN INEQUITIES IN THE AMOUNT OR QUALITY OF SERVICES PROVIDED, OR WHEN CHILDREN MAY BE ELIGIBLE FOR CERTAIN SERVICES IN SOME STATES, BUT NOT IN OTHERS.

services provided, or when children may be eligible for certain services in some states, but not in others.

ONE SCENARIO WOULD BE THAT A FEDERAL MANDATE FOR UPK WOULD EXIST, ACCOMPANIED BY A SET OF GUIDELINES AS TO HOW THIS MANDATE WILL BE IMPLEMENTED.

With respect to universal prekindergarten, one scenario would be that a federal mandate for UPK would exist, accompanied by a set of guidelines as to how this mandate will be implemented. This would provide the strongest impetus for a national system of UPK services, but would be politically and practically difficult to implement. Without such a mandate, how can there be a national set of standards for programs that do exist? One scenario is that the federal government could establish formal regulations for such programs combined with a set of financial incentives for states who choose to proceed with UPK. This has been very successful in the infant-toddler disability field, and could serve as a model for UPK. Tying federal support to specific guidelines for amount and quality of services will help achieve national uniformity of standards, but certainly there will be resistance from some states and much discussion will need to occur regarding the precise nature of the regulations that would be established.

ANOTHER SCENARIO IS THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT COULD ESTABLISH FORMAL REGULATIONS FOR SUCH PROGRAMS COMBINED WITH A SET OF FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR STATES WHO CHOOSE TO PROCEED WITH UPK.

A FINAL OPTION IS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND DISSEMINATION OF A SET OF GUIDELINES THAT COULD SHAPE STATE INITIATIVES, BUT WITHOUT INCENTIVES FOR THEIR IMPLEMENTATION.

A final option is for the development and dissemination of a set of guidelines that could shape state initiatives, but without incentives for their implementation. To be effective, these guidelines would have to be developed by a high profile, highly credible group or commission. Different constituents would need to feel that they had been provided sufficient opportunity for input on these guidelines. And the guidelines would need to be sufficiently detailed to specify what needs to be done yet sufficiently broad to allow flexibility in how they are achieved. For example, guidelines could affirm such principles as a) adequately trained staff, b) acceptable adult-child ratios, c) the need for individualization, d) affirmation of family rights and roles, and e) the need for broad-based programs focusing on all aspects of development rather than simply a preacademic initiative. Ways to use these guidelines effectively would need to be explored.

ULTIMATELY, FEDERAL POLICY MAKERS MUST DECIDE WHAT IS THE ACCEPTABLE LEVEL OF CROSS-STATE VARIATION IN PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS.

Ultimately, federal policy makers must decide what is the acceptable level of cross-state variation in prekindergarten programs. If a national commitment to these programs is determined desirable, much work will be needed to figure out how the federal government can exert maximum influence in order to achieve national goals, while at the same time

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reflecting the need for states to retain decision-making authority.

LESSON 4: PROVIDE FINANCIAL INCENTIVES AND FLEXIBLE FUNDING TO STIMULATE AND SUPPORT UNIVERSAL PREKINDERGARTEN.

EVEN WITHOUT MANDATES, FEDERAL INCENTIVES IN COMBINATION WITH APPROPRIATE REGULATIONS AND GUIDELINES CAN HAVE A MAJOR INFLUENCE ON PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT.

Part C of IDEA has shown that a federal mandate is not always necessary to achieve major program change. Even without mandates, federal incentives in combination with appropriate regulations and guidelines can have a major influence on program development. What has made this work with Part C is the combined impact of federal financial support, flexibility in use of funds, a timeline, and accountability for progress. Even though federal funds cover only a small percentage of the costs of services provided, they have been sufficient to stimulate state initiatives for infants and toddlers. Services for preschoolers are mandated, and thus the effect of federal funding on program development is difficult to ascertain. Theoretically, schools must serve all eligible children within a short period of time after referral and determination of program eligibility. It is likely that there is a substantial number of potentially eligible children who are not currently being served, but this would be due to lack of identification or parents' choice not to seek services.

A BEGINNING SCENARIO WOULD BE TO REACH NATIONAL CONSENSUS ON THE DESIRABILITY OF UPK.

PARALLEL TO THIS WORK WOULD BE A REVIEW AND REVISION OF THE REGULATIONS GOVERNING EXISTING FEDERAL INVESTMENTS IN PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS TO CREATE MORE FLEXIBILITY IN HOW THESE FUNDS ARE USED.

Considerable federal funding is already invested in preschool programs in the form of Head Start, childcare block grants, IDEA funds for preschoolers with disabilities, Title I, and other programs. A beginning scenario would be to reach national consensus on the desirability of universal prekindergarten and establish a broad set of guidelines that could serve as a framework for individualized implementation in states. Parallel to this work would be a review and revision of the regulations governing existing federal investments in preschool programs (Head Start, childcare, Title I, IDEA).

The purpose of these revisions would be to create more flexibility in how these funds are used so that states could, contingent on the development of an appropriate plan, merge these funds into a universal prekindergarten system that would meet the state's individual needs but be consistent with a nationally agreed-upon framework. This option will be quite challenging, as diverse federal programs such as childcare, maternal and child health, Head Start, and special education each have their own constituencies, and efforts to blend

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IDEALLY, THESE EFFORTS COULD BE COMBINED WITH NEW FUNDING TO STATES TO FACILITATE PLANNING AND COORDINATION OF UPK INITIATIVES.

these funds or allow more flexibility in their use will certainly meet some level of resistance. However, these changes will be essential if real change is to occur at the state level. Ideally, these efforts could be combined with new funding to states to facilitate planning and coordination of UPK initiatives. Care will need to be taken to assure that this funding is sufficient not only to stimulate program development, but also to assure adequate quality of services.

LESSON 5: INVOLVE PARENTS AND ADVOCATES IN ALL ASPECTS OF PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION.

WITHOUT THE TIRELESS EFFORTS OF PASSIONATE AND COMMITTED PARENTS, SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES WOULD NOT BE WHERE THEY ARE TODAY.

Advocacy groups can influence the extent to which and how new initiatives are implemented. Nowhere is this more evident than in the history of disability legislation and services. Without the tireless efforts of passionate and committed parents, services for children with disabilities would not be where they are today.

THERE HAS BEEN A NOTICEABLE LACK OF DISCUSSION OF THE ROLE OF UPK PROGRAMS VIS-À-VIS FAMILIES.

Involving parents and advocates will be a challenge for universal prekindergarten. There currently exists a substantial and noticeable void in parent leadership in prekindergarten initiatives. Furthermore, unlike the disability arena where families have a set of rights and programs are mandated to work with both children and families, there has been a noticeable lack of discussion of the role of universal prekindergarten programs vis-à-vis families. Discussions about universal prekindergarten must move beyond a focus on the child to examine how the program could fit with and support family needs and aspirations. A clear lesson from the disability field is that families can be the driving force behind major social change. Furthermore, families should be considered as primary consumers of any early childhood initiative and should be involved in planning services, both at the policy level as well as the individualized services for their children. A mechanism or set of mechanisms is needed for substantially increasing parent advocacy and parent leadership in the context of universal prekindergarten.

THE ARCHITECTS OF FEDERAL DISABILITY LEGISLATION REALIZED THAT THERE WAS A TREMENDOUS SHORTAGE OF QUALIFIED TEACHERS AND ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS TO WORK IN EARLY INTERVENTION AND PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS.

LESSON 6: A FEDERAL ROLE IN PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT IS ESSENTIAL.

The architects of federal disability legislation realized that there was a tremendous shortage of qualified teachers and allied health professionals to work in early intervention and preschool programs. In addition, there was a parallel shortage of faculty in institutions of higher education who had the

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FROM THE BEGINNING, FEDERAL LEGISLATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES HAS PROVIDED FUNDS TO STIMULATE AND SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF A WIDE RANGE OF UNIVERSITY-BASED TRAINING PROGRAMS.

PRESCHOOL AND PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS SUFFER THE SAME CHALLENGE AS SPECIAL EDUCATION IN TERMS OF A SHORTAGE OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL.

AN ADDITIONAL CHALLENGE NOT FACED BY SPECIAL EDUCATION IS THE CURRENT SYSTEM OF PAY AND BENEFITS.

FEDERAL FUNDS CAN STIMULATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW TRAINING PROGRAMS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.

experience and training necessary to meet the national need that would inevitably occur if a mandate to serve children with disabilities became national law. From the beginning, federal legislation for children with disabilities has provided funds to stimulate and support the development of a wide range of university-based training programs. Typically, these grants are used to provide stipends and tuition to attract qualified individuals into special education and related fields. A smaller but significant number of grants have been designated as "leadership" grants, and are used to support doctoral and postdoctoral training programs.

Preschool and prekindergarten programs suffer the same challenge as special education in terms of a shortage of qualified personnel. An additional challenge not faced by special education is the current system of pay and benefits for preschool and childcare teachers which is much less than that provided for K-12 teachers. Setting that issue aside for the moment, however, it is unlikely that states will have the resources to invest in training programs at the level needed. This will certainly be true for teacher training, but will be even more true for leadership training. Evidence from states who have implemented some form of prekindergarten suggests that most funds are needed to provide direct support for services, with minor support for in-service training. Federal funds can stimulate the development of new training programs in community colleges and universities, and help attract qualified individuals into the field.

This role will be essential in any national prekindergarten initiative. In the disability arena, however, grant funds are not typically allowed to support faculty salaries, and in an era of challenging state budgets, funds to attract students may not be a sufficient enticement for some universities without the possibility of faculty support as well. An inherent challenge in these programs is whether universities are willing or able to continue them once federal funding ends, and in many cases this has not been possible.

LESSON 7: ESTABLISH STATE AND LOCAL INTERAGENCY COORDINATING COUNCILS (ICC).

Although such councils have not typically been established for preschool special education, a state ICC was mandated for infant and toddler programs, recognizing that effective early intervention would require close coordination of a variety of

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different agencies. Regardless of auspice, the need to involve multiple state agencies and programs will be inevitable with any UPK initiative. The success of UPK will be a direct function of the state's ability to involve all of the relevant parties and do so in a way that is mutually acceptable to all. A state-level interagency coordinating council could play this role. To be most effective, such a council should not be part of any existing unit, but rather a newly constituted group, perhaps reporting to the governor or the legislature. Local interagency coordinating councils will also be needed to assure that practical collaboration occurs within each community.

Implications of UPK for Preschool Special Education

Assuming that states moved toward universal prekindergarten, how would this affect existing programs and services for children with disabilities? Although these programs are well entrenched within state and local agencies, a universal prekindergarten movement would inevitably create both challenges and opportunities for preschool special education. A similar question can and should be asked of other programs such as Head Start or childcare.

IN MANY WAYS, GUIDELINES FOR PROGRAMS SERVING PRESCHOOLERS WITH DISABILITIES WERE DESIGNED SO THAT THESE PROGRAMS COULD FIT INTO A LARGER SYSTEM OF SERVICES.

In many ways, guidelines for programs serving preschoolers with disabilities were designed so that these programs could fit into a larger system of services. A universal prekindergarten program would not necessarily require major modifications in the fundamental components of preschool disability programs, but at least four implications are possible.

IMPLICATION 1: THE STATE EDUCATION AGENCY WILL HAVE TO BE INVOLVED IN ANY UNIVERSAL PREKINDERGARTEN EFFORT.

THE STATE'S GOVERNOR AND THE EDUCATION SECRETARY WILL NEED TO REALIZE THAT SPECIAL EDUCATION INVOLVEMENT IN UPK IS INHERENTLY GOOD BOTH FOR UPK AND FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS.

Federal law mandates that preschool special education responsibilities fall under the auspice of the state education agency. In states currently considering or implementing some version of UPK, the state education agency is playing a major role. However, it is conceivable that some states will create a new unit or place UPK under the auspice of an agency other than education. If a state chooses to establish a UPK program that is not education based, then a structure will need to be in place to facilitate state education agency participation. The state's governor and the education secretary will need to

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realize that special education involvement in UPK is inherently good both for UPK and for special education programs, and a high level of commitment and collaborative participation in statewide planning will be necessary.

IMPLICATION 2: INCLUSION AND FULFILLMENT OF THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT PROVISIONS OF IDEA COULD BE ENHANCED.

A UPK INITIATIVE WOULD INCREASE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCLUSIONARY PLACEMENTS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES, AND REDUCE THE EXTENT TO WHICH SCHOOLS COULD USE A LACK OF NORMAL PRESCHOOL CLASSROOMS AS AN EXCUSE FOR SEGREGATED PLACEMENTS.

Federal law mandates that services for children with disabilities must be provided in the least restrictive environment, generally interpreted to mean that to the greatest extent possible children with disabilities should be placed in regular classrooms. Historically this has been a challenge for preschool special education since schools often do not have regular classes for 3- and 4-year-olds. Although regular class preschool placements have gradually increased over the past decade, the most recent report to Congress shows that only 53 percent of preschool children with disabilities are placed in a regular class (defined as spending no more than 20 percent of classroom time outside of the regular class). A UPK initiative would increase the opportunities for inclusionary placements and reduce the extent to which schools could use a lack of normal preschool classrooms as an excuse for segregated placements. This will be a positive move for the most part, but it will require school systems to reorganize preschool special education services, hopefully so that they are a part of an integrated UPK program for all children.

IMPLICATION 3: PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION WILL NEED TO CONSIDER HOW IT FITS INTO A BROADER INITIATIVE THAT FOCUSES ON SCHOOL READINESS AND CHILDCARE.

PARALLEL WITH ENHANCED OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCLUSION, UPK IMPLIES THAT EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION WOULD BE VIEWED AS A COLLABORATING PARTNER IN A BROADER INITIATIVE THAT MAY OR MAY NOT BE SCHOOL-BASED.

Preschool special education programs in the U.S. today typically operate in a relatively isolated fashion, often not integrated into the broader public school program or into other community-based programs. However, parallel with enhanced opportunities for inclusion, UPK implies that early childhood special education would be viewed as a collaborating partner in a broader initiative that may or may not be school-based. This will force a reconceptualization of the administrative structure, mission, and function of preschool special education programs. States and local school systems will need to consider how special education services can be provided in regular classes and whether those services should

be provided directly or on consultation to the regular UPK teacher. The school readiness goals of UPK may mean changes in both the curriculum and length of school day for children with disabilities.

IMPLICATION 4: FUNDING REGULATIONS AND OTHER GUIDELINES MAY NEED TO BE REVISED.

REVISION OF PROGRAM GUIDELINES SHOULD PRESERVE THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND ASSURANCES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF A BROADER UPK PROGRAM.

At both the federal and state levels, a review of funding streams and program guidelines will need to be undertaken. The purpose of this review should be the identification of guidelines or regulations that could serve as barriers to a UPK initiative and ultimately the revision of those guidelines so that the fundamental rights and assurances for children with disabilities are preserved, but can be assured in the context of a broader UPK program.

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